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to the Homes of
American Authors

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BY

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

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Little Journeys

SERIES FOR 1896

Little Journeys to the Homes of American Authors

The papers below specified, were, with the exception of that contributed by the editor, Mr. Hubbard, originally issued by the late G. P. Putnam, in 1853, in a series entitled *Homes of American Authors*. It is now nearly half a century since this series (which won for itself at the time a very noteworthy prestige) was brought before the public; and the present publishers feel that no apology is needed in presenting to a new generation of American readers papers of such distinctive biographical interest and literary value.

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"It was sometimes the case," continued Grandfather, "that affrays happened between such wild young men as these and small parties of the soldiers. No weapons had hitherto been used except fists or cudgels. But when men have loaded muskets in their hands, it is easy to foretell that they will soon be turned against the bosoms of those who provoke their anger."

"Grandfather," said little Alice, looking fearfully into his face, "your voice sounds as though you were going to tell us something awful!"

Grandfather's Chair.

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BY GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS.*

HAWTHORNE has himself drawn the picture of the "Old Manse" in Concord. He has given to it that quiet richness of coloring which ideally belongs to an old country mansion. It seems so fitting a residence for one who loves to explore the twilight of antiquity—and the gloomier the better—that the visitor, among the felicities of whose life was included the freedom of the Manse, could not but fancy that our author's eyes first saw the daylight enchanted by the slumberous orchard be-

* Written in 1853 for Putnam's *Homes of American Authors*.

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hind the house, or tranquillized into twilight by the spacious avenue in front. The character of his imagination, and the golden gloom of its blossoming, completely harmonize with the rusty, gable-roofed old house upon the river side, and the reader of his books would be sure that his boyhood and youth knew no other friends than the dreaming river, and the melancholy meadows and drooping foliage of its vicinity.

Since the reader, however, would greatly mistake if he fancied this, in good sooth, the ancestral halls of the Hawthornes,—the genuine Hawthorneden,—he will be glad to save the credit of his fancy by knowing that it was here our author's bridal tour,—which commenced in Boston, then three hours away,—ended, and his married life began. Here, also, his first child was born, and here those sad and silver mosses accumulated upon his fancy, from which he heaped so soft a bed for our dreaming. "Between two tall gate-posts of rough

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hewn stone (the gate itself having fallen from its hinges at some unknown epoch) we beheld the gray front of the old parsonage, terminating the vista of an avenue of black ash trees." It was a pleasant spring day in the year 1843, and as they entered the house, nosegays of fresh flowers, arranged by friendly hands, welcomed them to Concord and summer.

The dark-haired man, who led his wife along the avenue that afternoon, had been recently an officer of the customs in Boston, before which he had led a solitary life in Salem. Graduated with Longfellow at Bowdoin College, in Maine, he had lived a hermit in respectable Salem, an absolute recluse even from his own family, walking out by night and writing wild tales by day, most of which were burnt in his bachelor fire, and some of which, in newspapers, magazines, and annuals, led a wandering, uncertain, and mostly unnoticed life. Those tales, among this class, which were attainable, he collected into a small vol-

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ume, and apprising the world that they were "twice-told," sent them forth anew to make their own way, in the year 1841. But he piped to the world, and it did not dance. He wept to it, and it did not mourn. The book, however, as all good books do, made its way into various hearts. Yet the few penetrant minds which recognized a remarkable power and a method of strange fascination in the stories, did not make the public, nor influence the public mind. "I was," he says in the last edition of these tales, "the most unknown author in America." Full of glancing wit, of tender satire, of exquisite natural deception, of subtle and strange analysis of human life, darkly passionate and weird, they yet floated unhailed barques upon the sea of publicity, —unhailed, but laden and gleaming at every crevice with the true treasure of Cathay.

Bancroft, then Collector in Boston, prompt to recognize and to honor talent, made the dreaming story-teller a

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surveyor in the custom-house, thus opening to him a new range of experience. From the society of phantoms he stepped upon Long Wharf and plumply confronted Captain Cuttle and Dirck Hatteraick. It was no less romance to our author. There is no greater error of those who are called "practical men," than the supposition that life is, or can be, other than a dream to a dreamer. Shut him up in a counting-room, barricade him with bales of merchandise and limit his library to the ledger and cash-book, and his prospect to the neighboring signs; talk "Bills receivable" and "Sundries Dr. to Cash" to him forever, and you are only a very amusing or very annoying phantom to him. The merchant prince might as well hope to make himself a poet, as the poet a practical or practicable man. He has laws to obey not at all the less stringent because men of a different temperament refuse to acknowledge them, and he is held to a loyalty quite beyond their conceptions.

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So Captain Cuttle and Dirck Hatteraick were as pleasant figures to our author in the picture of life, as any others. He went daily upon the vessels, looked, and listened, and learned ; was a favorite of the sailors, as such men always are,—did his work faithfully, and having dreamed his dream upon Long Wharf, was married and slipped up to the Old Manse, and a new chapter in the romance. It opened in “the most delightful little nook of a study that ever offered its snug seclusion to a scholar.” Of the three years in the Old Manse the prelude to the *Mosses* is the most perfect history, and of the quality of those years the “Mosses” themselves are sufficient proof. They were mostly written in the little study, and originally published in the *Democratic Review*, then edited by Hawthorne’s friend O’Sullivan.

To the inhabitants of Concord, however, our author was as much a phantom and a fable as the old Pastor of the parish, dead half a century before, and whose

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faded portrait in the attic was gradually rejoining its original in native dust. The gate, fallen from its hinges in a remote antiquity, was never re-hung. The wheel-track leading to the door remained still overgrown with grass. No bold villager ever invaded the sleep of the glimmering shadows in the avenue. At evening no lights gleamed from the windows. Scarce once in many months did the single old knobby-faced coachman at the railroad bring a fare to "Mr. Hawthorne's." "*Is there anybody in the old house?*" sobbed the old ladies in despair, imbibing tea of a livid green. The knocker, which everybody had enjoyed the right of lifting to summon the good old Pastor, no temerity now dared touch. Heavens! what if the figure in the mouldy portrait should peer, in answer, over the eaves, and shake solemnly his decaying surplice! Nay, what if the mysterious man himself should answer the summons and come to the door! It is easy to summon spirits,

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—but if they come? Collective Concord, mowing in the river meadows, embraced the better part of valor and left the knocker untouched. A cloud of romance suddenly fell out of the heaven of fancy and enveloped the Old Manse :

In among the bearded barley
The reaper reaping late and early

did not glance more wistfully toward the island of Shalott and its mysterious lady than the reapers of Concord rye looked at the Old Manse and wondered over its inmate.

Sometimes, in the forenoon, a darkly clad figure was seen in the little garden-plot putting in corn or melon seed, and gravely hoeing. It was a brief apparition. The farmer passing toward town and seeing the solitary cultivator, lost his faith in the fact and believed he had dreamed, when, upon returning, he saw no sign of life, except, possibly, upon some Monday, the ghostly skirt of a shirt flapping spectrally in the distant orchard. Day dawned and darkened over the lonely

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house. Summer with "buds and bird-voices" came singing in from the South, and clad the old ash trees in deeper green, the Old Manse, in profounder mystery. Gorgeous autumn came to visit the storyteller in his little western study, and departing, wept rainbows among his trees. Winter impatiently swept down the hill opposite, rifling the trees of each last clinging bit of Summer, as if thrusting aside opposing barriers and determined to search the mystery. But his white robes floated around the Old Manse, ghostly as the decaying surplice of the old Pastor's portrait, and in the snowy seclusion of Winter the mystery was as mysterious as ever.

Occasionally Emerson, or Ellery Channing, or Henry Thoreau,—some Poet, as once Whittier, journeying to the Merri-mac, or an old Brook Farmer who remembered Miles Coverdale, with Arcadian sympathy,—went down the avenue and disappeared in the house. Sometimes a close observer, had he been am-

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bushed among the long grasses of the orchard, might have seen the host and one of his guests emerging at the back door, and sauntering to the river-side, step into the boat, and float off until they faded in the shadow. The spectacle would not have lessened the romance. If it were afternoon,—one of the spectrally sunny afternoons which often bewitch that region,—he would be only the more convinced that there was something inexplicable in the whole matter of this man whom nobody knew, who was never once seen at town-meeting, and concerning whom it was whispered that he did not constantly attend church all day, although he occupied the reverend parsonage of the village, and had unmeasured acres of manuscript sermons in his attic, beside the nearly extinct portrait of an utterly extinct clergyman. Mrs. Radcliffe and Monk Lewis were nothing to this; and the awe-stricken observer, if he could creep safely out of the long grass, he did not fail to do so

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quietly, fortifying his courage by remembering stories of the genial humanity of the last old Pastor who inhabited the Manse, and who for fifty years was the bland and beneficent Pope of Concord. A genial, gracious old man, whose memory is yet sweet in the village, and who, wedded to the grave traditions of New England theology, believed of his young relative, Waldo Emerson, as Miss Flights, touching her forehead, said of her landlord, that he was "m, quite m," but was proud to love in him the hereditary integrity of noble ancestors.

This old gentleman,—an eminent figure in the history of the Manse, and in all reminiscences of Concord,—partook sufficiently of mundane weaknesses to betray his mortality. Hawthorne describes him watching the battle of Concord, from his study window. But when the uncertainty of that dark moment had so happily resulted, and the first battle-ground of the Revolution had become a spot of hallowed and patriotic

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consideration, it was a pardonable pride in the good old man to order his servant, whenever there was company, to assist him in reaping the glory due to the owner of a spot so sacred. Accordingly, when some reverend or distinguished guest sat with the Pastor in his little parlor, or, of a summer evening, at the hospitable door under the trees, Jeremiah or Nicodemus, the cow-boy, would deferentially approach and inquire :

“Into what pasture shall I turn the cow to-night, Sir?”

And the old gentleman would audibly reply :

“Into the battle-field, Nicodemus, into the battle-field !”

Then naturally followed wonder, inquiry, a walk in the twilight to the river-bank, the old gentleman’s story, the corresponding respect of the listening visitor, and the consequent quiet complacency and harmless satisfaction in the clergyman’s bosom. That throb of pride was the one drop of peculiar advantage

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which the Pastor distilled from the revolution. He could not but fancy that he had a hand in so famous a deed accomplished upon land now his own, and demeaned himself, accordingly, with continental dignity.

The pulpit, however, was his especial sphere. There he reigned supreme ; there he exhorted, rebuked, and advised, as in the days of Mather. There he inspired that profound reverence, of which he was so proud, and which induced the matrons of the village, when he was coming to make a visit, to bedizen the children in their Sunday suits, to parade the best tea-pot, and to offer the most capacious chair. In the pulpit he delivered everything with the pompous cadence of the elder New England clergy, and a sly joke is told at the expense of his even temper, that on one occasion, when loftily reading the hymn, he encountered a blot upon the page quite obliterating the word, but without losing the cadence, although in a very vindictive tone at the truant

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word, or the culprit who erased it,—he finished the reading as follows :

He sits upon the throne above,
Attending angels bless,
While Justice, Mercy, Truth, and—(another word which is blotted out)
Compose his princely dress.

We linger around the old Manse and its occupants as fondly as Hawthorne, but no more fondly than all who have been once within the influence of its spell. There glimmers in my memory a few hazy days, of a tranquil and half-pensive character, which I am conscious were passed in and around the house, and their pensiveness I know to be only that touch of twilight which inhered in the house and its associations. Beside the few chance visitors I have named, there were city friends, occasionally, figures quite unknown to the village, who came preceded by the steam-shriek of the locomotive, were dropped at the gate-posts, and were seen no more. The owner was as much a vague name to me as any one.

During Hawthorne's first year's resi-

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dence in Concord, I had driven up with some friends to an æsthetic tea at Mr. Emerson's. It was in the winter and a great wood-fire blazed upon the hospitable hearth. There were various men and women of note assembled, and I, who listened attentively to all the fine things that were said, was for some time scarcely aware of a man who sat upon the edge of the circle, a little withdrawn, his head slightly thrown forward upon his breast, and his bright eyes clearly burning under his black brow. As I drifted down the stream of talk, this person, who sat silent as a shadow, looked to me, as Webster might have looked had he been a poet,—a kind of poetic Webster. He rose and walked to the window, and stood quietly there for a long time, watching the dead white landscape. No appeal was made to him, nobody looked after him, the conversation flowed steadily on as if everyone understood that his silence was to be respected. It was the same thing at table. In vain the

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silent man imbibed æsthetic tea. Whatever fancies it inspired did not flower at his lips. But there was a light in his eye which assured me that nothing was lost. So supreme was his silence that it presently engrossed me to the exclusion of everything else. There was very brilliant discourse, but this silence was much more poetic and fascinating. Fine things were said by the philosophers, but much finer things were implied by the dumbness of this gentleman with heavy brows and black hair. When he presently rose and went, Emerson, with the "slow, wise smile" that breaks over his face like day over the sky, said :

"Hawthorne rides well his horse of the night."

Thus he remained in my memory, a shadow, a phantom, until more than a year afterward. Then I came to live in Concord. Every day I passed his house, but when the villagers, thinking that perhaps I had some clue to the mystery, said :

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“Do you know this Mr. Hawthorne?”
I said: “No,” and trusted to Time.

Time justified my confidence and one day I, too, went down the avenue, and disappeared in the house. I mounted those mysterious stairs to that apocryphal study. I saw “the cheerful coat of paint, and golden-tinted paper-hangings, lighting up the small apartment; while the shadow of a willow tree, that swept against the overhanging eaves, attempered the cheery western sunshine.” I looked from the little northeru window whence the old Pastor watched the battle, and in the small dining-room beneath it, upon the first floor there were

Dainty chicken, snow-white bread,

and the golden juices of Italian vineyards, which still feast insatiable memory.”

Our author occupied the Old Manse for three years. During that time he was not seen probably, by more than a dozen of the villagers. His walks could

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easily avoid the town, and upon the river he was always sure of solitude. It was his favorite habit to bathe every evening in the river, after nightfall, and in that part of it over which the old bridge stood, at which the battle was fought. Sometimes, but rarely, his boat accompanied another up the stream, and I recall the silent and preternatural vigor with which, on one occasion, he wielded his paddle to counteract the bad rowing of a friend who conscientiously considered it his duty to do something and not let Hawthorne work alone; but who, with every stroke, neutralized all Hawthorne's efforts. I suppose he would have struggled until he fell senseless rather than ask his friend to desist. His principle seemed to be, if a man cannot understand without talking to him, it is quite useless to talk, because it is immaterial whether such a man understands or not. His own sympathy was so broad and sure, that although nothing had been said for hours, his companion knew that

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not a thing had escaped his eye, nor had a single pulse of beauty in the day, or scene, or society, failed to thrill his heart. In this way his silence was most social. Everything seemed to have been said. It was a Barmecide feast of discourse, from which a greater satisfaction resulted than from an actual banquet.

When a formal attempt was made to desert this style of conversation, the result was ludicrous. Once Emerson and Thoreau arrived to pay a call. They were shown into the little parlor upon the avenue, and Hawthorne presently entered. Each of the guests sat upright in his chair like a Roman senator; to them, Hawthorne, like a Dacian king. The call went on, but in a most melancholy manner. The host sat perfectly still, or occasionally propounded a question which Thoreau answered accurately, and there the thread broke short off. Emerson delivered sentences that only needed the setting of an essay to charm the world; but the whole visit was a

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vague ghost of the Monday Evening Club at Mr. Emerson's,—it was a great failure. Had they all been lying idly upon the river brink, or strolling in Thoreau's blackberry pastures, the result would have been utterly different. But imprisoned in the proprieties of a parlor, each a wild man in his way, with a necessity of talking inherent in the nature of the occasion, there was only a waste of treasure. This was the only "call" in which I ever knew Hawthorne to be involved.

In Mr. Emerson's house, I said it seemed always morning. But Hawthorne's black-ash trees and scraggy apple-boughs shaded "A land in which it seemed always afternoon." I do not doubt that the lotus grew along the grassy marge of the Concord behind his house, and that it was served, subtly concealed, to all his guests. The house, its inmates, and its life, lay, dream-like, upon the edge of the little village. You fancied that they all came together, and were glad that at length some idol of

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your imagination, some poet whose spell had held you, and would hold you, for ever, was housed as such a poet should be.

During the lapse of the three years since the bridal tour of twenty miles ended at the "two tall gate-posts of rough hewn stone," a little wicker wagon had appeared at intervals upon the avenue, and a placid babe, whose eyes the soft Concord day had touched with the blue of its beauty, lay looking tranquilly up at the grave old trees, which sighed lofty lullabies over her sleep. The tranquillity of the golden-haired Una was the living and breathing type of the dreamy life of the old Manse. Perhaps, that being attained, it was as well to go. Perhaps our author was not surprised nor displeased when the hints came, "growing more and more distinct, that the owner of the old house was pining for his native air." One afternoon I entered the study, and learned from its occupant that the last story he should ever write there was written. The son of the old pastor yearned

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for his homestead. The light of another summer would seek its poet in the Old Manse, but in vain.

While Hawthorne had been quietly writing in the "most delightful nook of a study," Mr. Polk had been elected President, and Mr. Bancroft in the Cabinet did not forget his old friend the surveyor in the custom-house. There came suggestions and offers of various attractions. Still loving New England, would he tarry there, or, as inspector of woods and forests in some far-away island of the Southern Sea, some hazy strip of distance seen from Florida, would he taste the tropics? He meditated all the chances, without immediately deciding. Gathering up his household gods, he passed out of the Old Manse as its heir entered, and before the end of summer was domesticated in the custom-house of his native town of Salem. This was in the year 1846.

Upon leaving the Old Manse he published the *Mosses*, announcing that it was

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the last collection of tales he should put forth. Those who knew him and recognized his value to our literature, trembled lest this was the last word from one who spoke only pearls and rubies. It was a foolish fear. The sun must shine—the sea must roll—the bird must sing, and the poet write. During his life in Salem, of which the introduction to the *Scarlet Letter* describes the official aspect, he wrote that romance. It is inspired by the spirit of the place. It presents more vividly than any history the gloomy picturesqueness of early New England life. There is no strain in our literature so characteristic or more real than that which Hawthorne had successfully attempted in several of his earlier sketches, and of which the *Scarlet Letter* is the great triumph. It became immediately popular, and directly placed the writer of stories for a small circle among the world's masters of romance.

Times meanwhile changed, and Presidents with them. General Tyler was

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elected, and the Salem Collector retired. It is one of the romantic points of Hawthorne's quiet life, that its changes have been so frequently determined by political events, which, of all others, are the most entirely foreign to his tastes and habits. He retired to the hills of Berkshire, the eye of the world now regarding his movements. There he lived a year or two in a little red cottage upon the "Stockbridge Bowl," as a small lake near that town is called. In this retreat he wrote the *House of the Seven Gables*, which more deeply confirmed the literary position already acquired for him by the first romance. The scene is laid in Salem, as if he could not escape a strange fascination in the witch-haunted town of our early history. It is the same black canvas upon which plays the rainbow-flash of his fancy, never, in its brightest moment, more than illuminating the gloom. This marks all his writings. They have a terrible beauty, like the Siren, and their fascination is sure.

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After six years of absence, Hawthorne has returned to Concord, where he has purchased a small house formerly occupied by Orphic Alcott. When that philosopher came into possession, it was a miserable house of two peaked gables. But the genius which recreated itself in devising graceful summer-houses, like that for Mr. Emerson, already noticed, soon smoothed the new residence into some kind of comeliness. It was an old house when Mr. Alcott entered it, but his tasteful finger touched it with picturesque grace. Not like a tired old drudge of a house, rusting into unhonored decay, but with a modest freshness that does not belie the innate sobriety of a venerable New England farm-house, the present residence of our author stands withdrawn a few yards from the high road to Boston, along which marched the British soldiers to Concord bridge. It lies at the foot of a wooded hill, a neat house of a "rusty olive hue," with a porch in front, and a central peak and a

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piazza at each end. The genius for summer-houses has had full play upon the hill behind. Here, upon the homely steppes of Concord, is a strain of Persia. Mr. Alcott built terraces, and arbors, and pavilions, of boughs and rough stems of trees, revealing—somewhat inadequately, perhaps—the hanging gardens of delight that adorn the Babylon of his Orphic imagination. The hill-side is no unapt emblem of his intellectual habit, which garnishes the arid commonplaces of life with a cold poetic aurora, forgetting that it is the inexorable law of light to deform as well as adorn. Treating life as a grand epic poem, the philosopher Alcott forgets that Homer must nod, or we should all fall asleep. The world would not be very beautiful nor interesting, if it were all one huge summit of Mont Blanc.

Unhappily, the terraced hill-side, like the summer-house upon Mr. Emerson's lawn, "lacks technical arrangement," and the wild winds play with these architectural toys of fancy, like lions with

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humming-birds. They are gradually falling, shattered,—and disappearing. Fine locust-trees shade them, and ornament the hill with perennial beauty. The hanging gardens of Semiramis were not more fragrant than Hawthorne's hill-side during the June blossoming of the locusts. A few young elms, some white pines and young oaks complete the catalogue of trees. A light breeze constantly fans the brow of the hill, making harps of the tree-tops, and singing to our author, who "with a book in my hand, or an unwritten book in my thoughts," lies stretched beneath them in the shade.

From the height of the hill the eye courses, unrestrained, over the solitary landscape of Concord, broad and still, broken only by the slight wooded undulations of insignificant hillocks. The river is not visible, nor any gleam of lake. Walden Pond is just behind the wood in front, and not far away over the meadows sluggishly steals the river. It is the most quiet of prospects. Eight

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acres of good land lie in front of the house, across the road, and in the rear the estate extends a little distance over the brow of the hill.

This latter is not good garden-ground, but it yields that other crop which the poet "gathers in a song." Perhaps the world will forgive our author that he is not a prize farmer, and makes but an indifferent figure at the annual cattle-show. We have seen that he is more nomadic than agricultural. He has wandered from spot to spot, pitching a temporary tent, then striking it for "fresh fields and pastures new." It is natural, therefore, that he should call his house "The Wayside,"—a bench upon the road where he sits for a while before passing on. If the wayfarer finds him upon that bench he shall have rare pleasure in sitting with him, yet shudder while he stays. For the pictures of our poet have more than the shadows of Rembrandt. If you listen to his story, the lonely pastures and dull towns of our dear old homely

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New England shall become suddenly as radiant with grace and terrible with tragedy as any country and any time. The waning afternoon in Concord, in which the blue-frocked farmers are reaping and hoeing, shall set in pensive glory. The woods will forever after be haunted with strange forms. You will hear whispers, and music "i' the air." In the softest morning you will suspect sadness; in the most fervent noon, a nameless terror. It is because the imagination of our author treads the almost imperceptible line between the natural and the supernatural. We are all conscious of striking it sometimes. But we avoid it. We recoil and hurry away, nor dare to glance over our shoulders lest we should see phantoms. What are these tales of supernatural appearances, as well authenticated as any news of the day,—and what is the sphere which they imply? What is the more subtle intellectual apprehension of fate and its influence upon imagination and life? Whatever it is, it is the mystery

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of the fascination of these tales. They converse with that dreadful realm as with our real world. The light of our sun is poured by genius upon the phantoms we did not dare to contemplate, and lo? they are ourselves, unmasked, and playing our many parts. An unutterable sadness seizes the reader, as the inevitable black thread appears. For here Genius assures us what we trembled to suspect, but could not avoid suspecting, that the black thread is inwoven with all forms of life, with all development of character.

It is for this peculiarity, which harmonizes so well with ancient places, whose pensive silence seems the trance of memory musing over the young and lovely life that illuminated its lost years,—that Hawthorne is so intimately associated with the "Old Manse." Yet that was but the tent of a night for him. Already with the *Blithedale Romance*, which is dated from Concord, a new interest begins to cluster around "The Wayside."

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I know not how I can more fitly conclude these reminiscences of Concord and Hawthorne, whose own stories have always a saddening close, than by relating an occurrence which blighted to many hearts the beauty of the quiet Concord river, and seemed not inconsonant with its lonely landscape. It has the further fitness of typifying the operation of our author's imagination : a tranquil stream, clear and bright with sunny gleams, crowned with lilies and graceful with swaying grass, yet doing terrible deeds inexorably, and therefore forever after, of a shadowed beauty.

Martha was the daughter of a plain Concord farmer, a girl of delicate and shy temperament, who excelled so much in study that she was sent to a fine academy in a neighboring town, and won all the honors of the course. She met at the school, and in the society of the place, a refinement and cultivation, a social gayety and grace, which were entirely unknown in the hard life she had

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led at home, and which by their very novelty, as well as because they harmonized with her own nature and dreams, were doubly beautiful and fascinating. She enjoyed this life to the full, while her timidity kept her only a spectator; and she ornamented it with a fresher grace, suggestive of the woods and fields, when she ventured to engage in the airy game. It was a sphere for her capacities and talents. She shone in it, and the consciousness of a true position and genial appreciation gave her the full use of all her powers. She admired and was admired. She was surrounded by gratifications of taste, by the stimulants and rewards of ambition. The world was happy, and she was worthy to live in it. But at times a cloud suddenly dashed athwart the sun—a shadow stole, dark and chill, to the very edge of the charmed circle in which she stood. She knew well what it was, and what it foretold, but she would not pause nor heed. The sun shone again; the future smiled; youth,

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beauty, and all gentle hopes and thoughts bathed the moment in lambent light.

But school-days ended at last, and with the receding town in which they had been passed, the bright days of life disappeared, and forever. It is probable that the girl's fancy had been fed, perhaps indiscreetly pampered, by her experience there. But it was no fairy-land. It was an academy town in New England, and the fact that it was so alluring is a fair indication of the kind of life from which she had emerged, and to which she now returned. What could she do? In the dreary round of petty details, in the incessant drudgery of a poor farmer's household, with no companions of any sympathy—for the family of a hard-working New England farmer are not the Chloes and Clarissas of pastoral poetry, nor are cow-boys Corydons,—with no opportunity of retirement and cultivation, for reading and studying, which is always voted “stuff” under such circumstances,—the light suddenly

Nathaniel Hawthorne

quenched out of life, what was she to do?

“Adapt herself to her circumstances. Why had she shot from her sphere in this silly way?” demands unanimous common sense in valiant heroics.

The simple answer is, that she had only used all her opportunities, and that, although it was no fault of hers that the routine of her life was in every way repulsive, she did struggle to accommodate herself to it,—and failed. When she found it impossible to drag on at home, she became an inmate of a refined and cultivated household in the village, where she had opportunity to follow her own fancies, and to associate with educated and attractive persons. But even here she could not escape the feeling that it was all temporary, that her position was one of dependence; and her pride, now grown morbid often drove her from the very society which alone was agreeable to her. This was all genuine. There was not the slightest strain of the *femme*

Nathaniel Hawthorne

incomprise in her demeanor. She was always shy and silent, with a touching reserve which won interest and confidence, but left also a vague sadness in the mind of the observer. After a few months she made another effort to rend the cloud which was gradually darkening around her, and opened a school for young children. But although the interest of friends secured for her a partial success, her gravity and sadness failed to excite the sympathy of her pupils, who missed in her the playful gayety always most winning to children. Martha, however, pushed bravely on, a figure of tragic sobriety to all who watched her course. The farmers thought her a strange girl, and wondered at the ways of a farmer's daughter who was not content to milk cows, and churn butter, and fry pork, without further hope or thought. The good clergyman of the town, interested in her situation, sought a confidence she did not care to bestow, and so, doling out *a, b, c*, to a wild group of boys and

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girls, she found that she could not untie the Gordian knot of her life, and felt, with terror, that it must be cut.

One summer evening she left her father's house and walked into the fields alone. Night came, but Martha did not return. The family became anxious, inquired if anyone had noticed the direction in which she went, learned from the neighbors that she was not visiting, that there was no lecture nor meeting to detain her, and wonder passed into apprehension. Neighbors went into the adjacent woods and called, but received no answer. Every instant the awful shadow of some dread event solemnized the gathering groups. Everyone thought what no one dared to whisper, until a low voice suggested "the river." Then, with the swiftness of certainty, all friends, far and near, were roused, and thronged along the banks of the stream. Torches flashed in boats that put off in the terrible search. Hawthorne, then living in the Old Manse, was summoned, and the man

Matthaniel Bawtborne

whom the villagers had only seen at morning as a musing spectre in his garden, now appeared among them at night to devote his strong arm and steady heart to their service. The boats drifted slowly down the stream—the torches flared strangely upon the black repose of the water, and upon the long, slim grasses that, weeping, fringed the marge. Upon banks, silent and awe-stricken crowds hastened along, eager and dreading to find the slightest trace of what they sought. Suddenly they came upon a few articles of dress, heavy with the night dew. No one spoke, for no one had doubted the result. It was clear that Martha had strayed to the river, and quietly gained the repose she sought. The boats gathered round the spot. With every implement that could be of service the melancholy task began. Long intervals of fearful silence ensued, but at length, toward midnight, the sweet face of the dead girl was raised more

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placidly to the stars than ever it had been to the sun.

Oh ! is it weed, or fish, or floating hair,—
A tress o' golden hair,
O' drownèd maiden's hair,
Above the nets at sea ?
Was never salmon yet that shone so fair
Among the stakes on Dee.

So ended the village tragedy. The reader may possibly find in it the original of the thrilling conclusion of the *Blithedale Romance*, and learn anew that dark as is the thread with which Hawthorne weaves his spells, it is no darker than those with which tragedies are spun, even in regions apparently so torpid as Concord.

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